

**ORHAN PAMUK'S *MY NAME IS RED*: AN AMALGAM  
OF PERSPECTIVES**

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**Abstract**

*My Name is Red is a best-selling novel written by the Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk, who gave a new identity to Turkish Literature has triggered the ignition for avant garde writing in Turkish main stream fiction. His novels have amplified the frame of reference on post modernism. The present novel represents microcosm of Turkey, its society, its politics and its Ottoman culture, jeopardized between Eastern and Western diagonal pulls and Istanbul. The present paper is an attempt to unearth the several perspectives of the novel to fulfill its purpose of narration.*

**Keyword:** *identity, characters, history, perspectives, Orhan Pamuk ...*

## ORHAN PAMUK'S *MY NAME IS RED*: AN AMALGAM OF PERSPECTIVES

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**O**rhan Pamuk, a leading, contemporary Turkish novelist and Nobel Prize winner for literature in 2006, embarks on a long journey to find out Turkish glory of Ottoman Empire. In his novels he deals with certain universal themes like quest for new identity, East-West conflict, dominating Western culture and its impact on Turkish society, fast spreading consumerism, pursuit of love and its vanity. He has inked ten novels, his own autobiography and two essays. His famous works are *The White Castle*, *The New Life*, *The Museum of Innocence*, *My Name is Red* and *Snow*. He lives in Istanbul and teaches as a professor of Comparative Literature at Columbia University, UAS.

*My Name is Red* (2001) is a magnum opus of Orhan Pamuk, which claimed a well famous International IMPAC Dublin Award in 2003. The story takes place in the late 16th century Istanbul. Black, the protagonist of the novel, has returned to his hometown after a voluntary self-exile, partially caused by his broken heart over the marriage of his childhood friend and cousin, Shekure. Upon his return, Black visits Shekure's father, his maternal uncle, Enishte, who is in charge of a commission to create an illustrated book to celebrate Sultan's Decree in the thousandth year of the Islamic calendar. The illustrations are to be created by several well known miniaturists of the era and are to be kept as a secret because the pictures are to be drawn in the western. The several miniaturists who are commissioned to draw parts of this picture have not seen the complete work. One of these miniaturists has been murdered and Enishte is eager to find out the identity of the murderer. The murderer is possibly one of the other miniaturists and the clue is a miniature horse drawing with split nostrils which is found in the possession of the victim. Enishte asks Black's help as an objective observer. Black sees this as an opportunity to be close to Shekure whose husband has not returned from war and who is presumably dead. During this process, Enishte is also murdered. Although the murderer of both the miniaturist and Enishte is revealed at the end, it is not Black alone who solves the mystery.

In this text, Pamuk gives voice to each and every character to intensify the objective of his writing. He has used multiple plots and character-narrators. The multiplicity of plots and narrators in the novel creates problems. Pamuk has used various characters including images, animals and humans. His style of giving voice to each character reminds us of heteroglossia that gets textualized in the novel. A Corpse speaks in the first chapter and this unusual narration continues in further chapters. Like Corpse, Dog, Tree, Horse, Gold Coin, Death, Red and Satan get chance to develop the plot further. However, Black, Beloved Uncle, Shekure, Butterfly, Esther, Master Osman etc. are the usual character-narrators. There is reason behind using multiple character-narrators and non-human characters. Gold Coin, a non-human character-narrator, narrates that it is not pure but counterfeit. However, other persons like Stork and Butterfly treat it as pure gold coin. Even the readers consider it as pure but the mystery unveils when the coin speaks itself.

Shekure, in anger, discloses the truth that his father Enishte Effendi shares bed with his slave girl Hayriye. Until she disclosed this fact, it was another truth that Enishte is a renowned moral artist. So, problem arises regarding the truth. Which condition, before disclosing the fact or after disclosing the fact, is true? Should we believe Shekure who tells something in anger and recants later? Likewise, need we to believe on Husret Hoja, who believes coffee as devil's ruse? Is coffee really a devil's ruse or is it just an expression guided by religious preoccupation? What about the dog, which considers humans less rational than beasts? Therefore, we can deduce that expressions are the result of socio-politico-historical situatedness. Behind declaring something, there is the role of culture, society, politics, history etc. These factors convert truth and knowledge to mere perspectives.

In the same way, Pamuk excavates the bitter reality of miniaturist painters. No doubt, miniaturist painters are still famous in the world. But it will be strange to the modern readers to reveal that those miniaturists would be engaged in murdering and killing to be the best illuminator. Their claim to be the best turns out to be their one-sided evaluation that leads their understanding to be only perspective. Not only miniaturist painters but also other characters like Husret Hoja, Dog, Corpse, Esther etc. get affected by the same disease.

Butterfly, a miniaturist painter, claims to be the best artist. Likewise, both Olive and Stork also claim to be the best. So, it becomes very difficult to know the best. Whom should we believe- Butterfly, Stork or Olive? Or, can there be many best artists? Similarly, the

Murderer acts as if he is grieved most by the death of Elegant Effendi and even the other people believe him. But, the murderer himself says that he is pretending of grieving so that others won't suspect him as the murderer. So, what about those characters who are unaware of this fact? Are not they believing on something as true which is not exactly? However, Feride Cicekoglu reads this novel as the confrontation of 'Word' and 'Image'. In his essay "A Pedagogy of Two Ways of Seeing: Confrontation of 'Word and Image' in My Name is Red", he writes:

What is unique is the role that the confrontation of different traditions of painting, Western and Islamic, and that between "word and image" play in the resolution of the love story and the solving of the mystery. The tradition of miniature painting, the illumination and illustration of narrative texts, which legitimized itself as the art of the book, may be interpreted as a way of dealing with the iconoclastic tradition of Islam. In this context, images are not seen as things-in-themselves but they are treated as "footnotes" even when the image seems to dominate the written word on the page. Image making becomes an extension of the, rather than an independent art. (Cicekoglu)

Cicekoglu's attention gets attracted by the images depicted in the book. He considers those images as the footnotes for understanding miniaturist paintings and Islamic tradition. However, he is much interested to strike words with images and find their position. He finds images much dominant than words. So, he describes this novel as the expression of images.

When all the miniaturists run behind money and power, we are obliged to consider that money and power are determining factors of everything. Probably, Sultan Murat III, the imperialist king of Ottoman Empire of late sixteenth century, commissions Enishte Effendi to illustrate a book in Venetian style so that he could impress the Westerners to elongate the age of his rule. (Add quote) The depiction of Sultan Murat III and his ruling period as setting of the novel, presenting of Master Osman, a historical man, as a character; and mentioning and describing many historical events, persons and places to forward the plot confuse the readers. Whether we are reading a fictional work or historical document, we get turmoil sometimes. Even the autobiographical, social and religious aspects of the author add this confusion.

New historical reading of the novel *My Name is Red* tries to prove the notion that knowledge and truth are only perspectives. They get changed with time, place and persons.

Money, power, socio-politico-cultural background, religion, gender etc. are the factors that help to convert truth and knowledge to perspectives. Like truth and knowledge, history also gets questioned in new historicism. Pamuk has tried to capture the new sense of history in his fictional work. In new historicism, history is understood as the relative factor that is affected by power and politics. The very sense of history gets textualized when Pamuk presents Sultan Murat III and Master Osman as historical characters with their other side. Obviously, Sultan Murat III was the imperialist king of the then Ottoman Empire. His grand deeds were recorded in history. However, his negative sides were concealed. Pamuk unveils those aspects. Sultan had greed for power, therefore, he secretly commissioned Enishete Effendi, a miniaturist painter, for illustrating a book in Venetian Style so that he could impress the westerners and save his throne.

Thus, the present research contends that Pamuk advocates relative, contaminated and subjective truth, by bringing different perspectives into use, in *My Name is Red*. In this regard, he stands as the critique of absolute, pure and objective truth.

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